

## The State Park Movement in America: a Critical Review

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*The State Park Movement in America: A Critical Review*, by Ney C. Landrum. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004. xv, 288 pp. Illustrations, notes, appendixes, bibliography, index. \$44.95 cloth.

Reviewer Rebecca Conard is professor of history at Middle Tennessee State University. She is the author of *Places of Quiet Beauty* (1987), an environmental history of Iowa's state park and preserve systems in the twentieth century.

*The State Park Movement in America* is a useful review of an important twentieth-century American phenomenon, skillfully woven with the reflective comments of a respected leader among state park directors. Ney Landrum's primary audience is park professionals, so this study is not firmly situated in the context of American social, political, or environmental history, though it would be difficult to write such a study because, as Landrum correctly observes, "too little research and documentation has been done in individual state cases" (70). Nonetheless, historians, policymakers, and those with an interest in park politics and policy issues will find much of interest in this book.

Landrum begins by discussing the elusive definition of *state park* and covers familiar nineteenth-century efforts that set precedents for the emergence of a state park movement in the twentieth. Iowa figures prominently in chapter 4, which covers citizen-led initiatives nationwide between 1900 and 1920. Landrum notes that Iowa may have been atypical and rightly calls attention to the influence of two natural scientists, Thomas Macbride (misspelled "McBride") and Louis Pammel, in promoting and developing a state park system for a broad array of resource conservation and preservation purposes. Although Landrum does not similarly recognize the influence of organized and individual women in shaping Iowa's state park policy, he notes that state federations of women's clubs played important roles in Florida and New Jersey. Atypical or not, Iowa hosted the First National Conference on Parks in 1921, an event specifically designed to highlight fledgling state efforts and to stimulate a more general state park movement. Landrum neatly summarizes the internal dynamics of the (retitled) National Conference on *State Parks* (NCSP) during the 1920s and 1930s as it shifted from an "organization . . . dominated by prominent, well-connected, civic-minded citizens" to a "more down-to-earth" body of state park professionals (122).

The next few chapters demonstrate how New Deal federal spending elevated the recreational use of parks in general and state parks in particular. The Civilian Conservation Corps alone developed or improved more than 400 state parks in 43 states, and "in many cases the product was a brand new turnkey recreation area" (137). The Land Program of the short-lived Resettlement Administration spent millions

on land acquisition for and development of Recreational Demonstration Areas (RDAs), 46 projects located in 24 states. Beginning in 1942, the federal government turned over many RDAs to states for public parks. In 1936 Congress authorized a comprehensive study of parks, parkways, and recreational areas throughout the country. The resulting 1942 report, *A Study of the Park and Recreation Problem of the United States*, launched the National Park Service's practice of "systematic inventories [that] continued on an annual basis through 1962, with increasing accuracy and completeness" (152).

Landrum speaks with insider knowledge about the "major realignment of professional support organizations" (197) that began in the 1960s in tandem with a vast expansion of state parks, driven by public demand for outdoor recreation and new sources of federal funding, especially the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Two new organizations, the National Association of State Park Directors (NASPD) and the National Parks and Recreation Association, supplanted the National Conference on State Parks. Landrum himself played a major role in shaping the NASPD as president in 1977 and as the organization's first executive director (1988–1997). During its first two decades, the NASPD instituted an "annual information exchange" among state park directors, data which, Landrum asserts, "present a more comprehensive picture of America's fifty state park system than any other source document" (209).

In the last chapter, Landrum examines current state park mission statements for key concepts—the terms *recreation*, *conservation/preservation*, and *nature* dominate official declarations of purpose (226–27). He further notes that a 1985 study of critical issues found that state park directors were most concerned with overcrowding and resource degradation from visitor use (229–30). Running counter to such official pronouncements, however, in 1993 state park directors gave only lukewarm support to an NASPD internal "stewardship survey" on the condition that "the findings would be released as national averages, and that all directors would be asked not to divulge their own state's data" for several years (231). This suggests that as state park management has become ever more professional, it also has become more bureaucratic and politicized. Herein lies the crux of what Landrum sees as a fundamental failing of the state park profession to "define purposes and set standards for general consideration and guidance." He challenges the profession, and the NASPD in particular, to take up this responsibility in order "to provide sustained, unimpaired, resource-based outdoor recreation potential for coming generations" (258).

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